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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000899

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: ANP LEADER ASFUNDYAR WALI KHAN

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 786

[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 745

[1](#)C. ISLAMABAD 835

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: This is one of several profiles on politicians who may be major players in the new Pakistani government. Asfundyar Wali Khan is leader of the Awami National Party (ANP), a Pashtun nationalist party with support throughout the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). After a dismal ANP performance in the 2002 elections, Asfundyar successfully reenergized the party, resulting in ANP winning seats in the February 2008 legislative elections. PPP co-chair Asif Zardari has mentioned the forward-looking Asfundyar as a possible consensus candidate for Prime Minister, but Khan prefers to focus on provincial concerns. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In 2002, the ANP lost to the MMA religious bloc of parties promising both Sharia law and better government services. The MMA delivered neither, and its leaders were increasingly associated with growing militant violence. This election, the ANP benefited from MMA's poor performance and a boycott by one of the major MMA parties. The ANP won 10 National Assembly seats, 33 Provincial Assembly seats from Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), two seats in Sindh's Provincial Assembly, and two seats in Balochistan's Provincial Assembly. Khan --an eloquent speaker who is well-versed in Pakistan's political and constitutional affairs--was elected to the National Assembly from Charsadda. Although he is still a Senator, he is likely to vacate this position and assume his National Assembly seat. Khan has agreed to form a coalition government at the national and the NWFP levels with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Zardari discussed giving Asfyndyar (REF A) the prime ministership. However, Asfundyar told Ambassador he was uninterested in heading a national coalition government and prefers to focus, on the national level, on NWFP and FATA concerns (REF C).

[1](#)3. (C) Asfundyar intends to pursue NWFP fiscal autonomy, to change the name of NWFP to "Pushtunistan" or "Afghania," and to recast what he views as a negative national view of Pakistan's Pashtuns. Khan publicly has emphasized the need to bring peace to the NWFP and FATA and condemns militant violence. He also has been critical of civilian casualties resulting from military action in the tribal areas, has questioned the Musharraf government's willingness to make peace deals with militants such as Baitullah Mehsud, and he

has accused Musharraf of playing a "double-game" with the West.

#### It's All in the Family

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¶4. Like many political parties in Pakistan, ANP leadership has been in Khan's family since partition. Asfundyar's grandfather and initial party leader, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, was a close friend of Ghandi and a respected leader in the subcontinent's independence struggle. Party leadership passed to Asfundyar's father, Wali Khan, who also maintained good relations with the Ghandhi family. Several Ghandhis in 2006 attended the elder Wali Khan's funeral in Charsadda. Asfundyar continues the foster relations with Zardari and the Ghandhis; he also has a good relationship with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

¶6. (C) Asfundyar entered politics after his father retired in 1990. His stepmother, Begum Nasim, objected as she wished for her son to assume the party's political leadership. While Wali Khan's decision seemed to be based on Asfundyar's political abilities and his following within the party, his selection sparked a feud between Asfundyar and his stepmother that greatly weakened the party. The death of Asfundyar's father in January 2006 appears to have buried the animosity between Asfundyar and his stepmother. Asfundyar touched her feet (a gesture of respect) during the burial, and she vowed not to discriminate between him and her biological son.

#### Career History

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¶7. (C) Asfundyar easily won National Assembly seats in 1993

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and 1997. He was made Chair of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Kashmir and the Northern Areas (1997-99) in exchange for joining Sharif's coalition government. Following Musharraf's 1999 coup, Asfundyar vigorously opposed the military's intervention into electoral politics (as had his father and grandfather before him). A number of ANP officials were arrested in the coup's aftermath and several were charged with corruption.

¶8. (C) In 2000, his stepmother challenged his leadership of the party, and a number of senior party officials defected to her camp. The ANP remained divided before the 2002 parliamentary elections, and the party's performance was its worst ever. ANP won no National Assembly seats and only a few provincial seats. During the 2002 campaign, Asfundyar refused to condemn the American invasion of Afghanistan, and Pashtun anger and nationalism over this issue caused many traditional ANP voters to abandon the party in favor of the MMA.

¶9. (C) The ANP's fortunes improved in the 2003 Senate elections, and Asfundyar was elected as a Senator from NWFP. He has since worked to reunite the ANP and reenergize its grassroots base. Asfundyar allied with Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) for the 2005 local elections in an unsuccessful attempt to thwart Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) and the PPP-Sherpao party's influence, but his failure to win overwhelmingly in district mayoral elections prompted Asfundyar to reevaluate his relationship with the government. Asfundyar, having refused many previous overtures, recently held a major convention of FATA tribal leaders at the GOP's urging and sought their cooperation in the ongoing fight against foreign terrorism in the FATA.

¶10. (C) Asfundyar was born on February 19, 1949 in Mardan, NWFP. He received a degree in Commerce from Peshawar University. He speaks very good English.

¶11. (C) Comment: Having the ANP in its coalition at both the national and NWFP levels will give the PPP added

credibiilty in working with Pashtun tribesmen on both sides of the border in the fight against extremist militancy. We expect Asfundyar to support PPP objectives, including allowing all political parties to operate in the FATA, that will open political dialogue and pave the way for eventually incorporating FATA into the NWFP.

PATTERSON